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United States' Geostrategic Interests and the Resolution of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 2000-2023

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Abstract: Despite numerous mediation efforts of US including the Camp David Accord, Roadmap for Peace, the Annapolis Conference, Peace to Prosperity Plan, and the Abraham Accords to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, the conflict has persisted, with recurring cycles of violence, uprisings and wars. Therefore, this study examined how United States' geostrategic interests in the Middle East have shaped the peace process in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The study adopted a qualitative research design in which data were collected from secondary sources, presented in tables and figures, and analysed using the thematic content analysis method. This study was anchored on the assumptions of the theory of classical realism. The study found that the US' geostrategic interests in the region include securing access to maritime chokepoints, protecting the sovereignty of Israel and preventing the spread of nuclear weapon and that these interests have contributed to the protraction of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Arising from these findings, the study recommended amongst others that Arab states should reduce their military dependence on the United States to ensure diversification of defense partnerships and greater negotiating powers and Security Council of United Nations, the Arab League and the US should re-assess their peace initiatives in resolving the conflict and immediately design a proper peace plan with adequate implementation strategies and financial provisions that addresses the concerns of the parties in conflict.

Keywords: Geostrategy, National Interest, Mediation and Conflict

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1. Introduction

The Arab-Israeli conflict has remained one of the most persistent and complex geopolitical disputes in modern history. Despite numerous mediation efforts of the United States, including the Camp David Accord, Oslo Accords, Roadmap for Peace, the Annapolis Conference, Peace to Prosperity Plan, and the Abraham Accords, the conflict has persisted with recurring cycles of violence, uprisings and wars [1].

A deadly confrontation started on October 7, 2023, when Hamas terrorists executed a terror strike in Southern Israel during a Jewish holiday. Over 1,200 civilians, mostly Israelis, were slain, and 240 individuals, including the elderly, were held captive by Hamas terrorists [2], [3]. In response, the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) initiated aerial, naval, and terrestrial attacks on Gaza, resulting in the deaths of 31,000 individuals, with further casualties anticipated as hostilities persist [4]. United Nations reports indicate that by the latter half of November 2023, approximately 60 percent of Information and Communication Technology infrastructure, over 60 percent of health and education

facilities, and 70 percent of commerce-related infrastructure in Gaza are either damaged or destroyed [5].

The war has adversely affected the Palestinian economy, resulting in increased poverty among Palestinians. The violence intensifies existing structural vulnerabilities, and international attempts to mitigate them have shown little progress. Although the U.S. has facilitated peace endeavours, these endeavours have not resulted in a sustainable settlement of the war. The war has continued, marked by intermittent escalations of violence. This research analysed how the United States' geo-strategic interests in the Middle East have influenced the peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The aims of this research are to explore the United States' geo-strategic interests in the Middle East and to investigate the influence of these interests on the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Conceptual Review

Concept of Geo-Strategy

The notion of geo-strategy, prevalent in international politics, is often used by States when formulating strategic plans that take into account land, water, distances, and other geographical considerations. Frederick L [6], [7]. Schuman was the first user of the word geo-strategy in his 1942 paper "Let Us Learn Our Geopolitics". Karl Haushofer, a German geo-strategist, used the term "Wehrgeopolitik" to denote "defense-geopolitics," whereas Robert Strausz-Hupé introduced and popularised an alternative translation as "war geopolitics". Grygiel asserts that geo-strategy refers to the specific location(s) that a nation prioritises and allocates political, diplomatic, and military resources towards, as reflected in its foreign policy objectives [8].

Lynn defines geo-strategy as the spatial orientation of a state's foreign policy. It delineates the areas where a state concentrates its efforts by exerting military influence and orchestrating diplomatic initiatives [9]. The fundamental premise of geo-strategy is that nations possess finite resources and are incapable, regardless of their willingness, of executing a comprehensive foreign policy. Instead, they must concentrate politically and militarily on certain regions of the globe. Rogers and Simón, 2010.

Concept of Conflict

The term conflict derives from the Latin word *confligere*, which means to strike together. Lexically, conflict denotes to strike, strangle, or engage in combat; it encompasses clash, contention, confrontation, disagreement, or quarrel, as well as active opposition, strife, or incompatibility. It signifies encountering resistance or hostility, being contradictory, or being at variance. Similar to numerous concepts within the Social Sciences, conflict lacks a broadly accepted definition. Nearly every academic discipline possesses its theoretical framework for comprehending conflicts; economists concentrate on game theory and decision-making, psychologists investigate interpersonal conflicts, sociologists emphasise status and class conflicts, while political science focusses on intra-national and international conflicts. This review focusses on intra-national and international conflicts [10], [11], [12].

Concept of National Interest

National interest is a concept that plays a central role in the understanding of the driving force in international conflict and in the study of international relations. Gilbert averred that national interest represents a country's goals and objectives in the international arena. National interest is often seen as a self-interested pursuit of power, security, and wealth that nations seek to achieve through their foreign policies [13].

Nte averred that the national interest of one State can become the national doom of another State and could be invoked to justify an evil action. Invariably, some actions that are detrimental to other States are couched in morally acceptable language of protecting a national interest but the ulterior motive is to make strategic magnificent benefits at the

expense of the impacted State. This is evident in the US foreign policy towards Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan and also in the 1884 partitioning of Africa which was obviously for the economic exploitation of the continent by the Europeans [14].

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the theory of Classical Realism as the theoretical framework of analysis to underpin the study. The proponents of Classical Realism are Thucydides, Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, Otto von Bismack, and Sun Tzu (Gilbert, 2013). Realism is very relevant in understanding the United States geostrategic interests in the Middle East and the actions of State and non-State actors in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The core assumptions of Realism which made it useful for this study is enveloped in the State's national interest which is encapsulated in; statism, survival, self-help [15]. These 3Ss (statism, survival and self-help), vividly explains the actions of the various actors in the conflict.

First is statism, States are the major actors in the international system and sovereignty is its distinguishing characteristics. States like Israel, US, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and others are seriously engaged in the conflict to protect its sovereignty. Israeli has constantly remained aggressive to protect its territorial sovereignty and doesn't hesitate to go to full scale war with any Arab States that attempts to undermine its sovereignty in the Middle East.

Second is survival, the argument is that, in international system, the predominant goal of States is survival. From the ongoing conflict, the ultimate concern of States in the conflict is survival which made them to constantly pursue their security and protect its territories from invasion and attacks. Israel is fighting seriously to ensure its survival as a State in the Middle East. Palestine is also fighting to ensure its survival as a State by ensuring that the two-state solution recommended by UN does not succeed, thereby insisting Israelis to vacate their territory in its territory. The US is equally supporting Israel to secure its economic survival in the Middle East. Other Arab States like Egypt, Syria and Lebanon are also supporting Palestine to secure its survival in the region [16].

Third is self-help, the security of a state can only be realized through self-help due to the anarchical nature of the international system. This reality best describes the actions and inactions of United States of America, Israel, Palestine and other Arab States in the conflict. Israeli Government has constantly adopted self-help to fight PLA, Hamas, Hezbollah and other terrorists' groups in its territory and borders before supports from its allies start coming. Palestinian Authorities equally resorts to self-help before supports start coming from other Arab States, this manifested in the first and second intifada.

More so, realism posits that, States seek to acquire, maintain and expand their power in the international system, even when their actions go against moral standard and international laws. This really explain why Israel always acquire more military technologies and occupy more territories in any war they emerge victorious regardless of the provisions of international laws and many lives and infrastructures that may be lost in achieving its survival and national interest by retaliating every aggressive attack from any of its enemies in the Middle East. This is also seen in the ongoing war with Hamas terrorists.

2. Materials and Methods

This study adopted qualitative research design in which data were collected from secondary sources like historical documents, review of relevant literature and published articles, presented in tables and figures, and analysed using thematic content analysis method

Thematic Content Analyses

The United States' Geo-Strategic Interests in the Middle East

The United States has several geostrategic interests in the Middle East which include; (1) ensuring access and control of maritime choke points and water ways, including the Red Sea, (2) maintaining its military bases in the Middle East, (3) protecting client States and friendly regimes, (4) protecting the sovereignty of Israel, (5) preventing the spread of Islamic extremism/terrorism, and (6) preventing nuclear weapon proliferation.

The US pursues these identified geostrategic interests in the region with uncompromising vigor which has significant impacts on the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict. The United States geostrategic interests of controlling the maritime choke points, sea routes and water ways, including the Red Sea consolidate the position of Sir. Walter Raleigh noted that whomever controls the sea controls commerce; whoever controls global trade governs the world's wealth, and hence the world itself. The unbroken control of vital maritime chokepoints is crucial for contemporary states, including the United States, as it was for Raleigh and his friends. Raleigh and his friends established a commercial empire underpinned by the Royal Navy's dominance over the maritime communication routes between England, its colonies, and its trade partners. The United States maintains its dominance over strategic choke points via its formidable military and alliances with regional partners, like to Raleigh and his companions. Consequently, since over 80 percent of global trade transpires via maritime routes, and the United States relies on the unobstructed flow of its portion of that trade, the United States and its allies strive to guarantee access to the seas to safeguard their economic and political security, thereby reinforcing their national interests.

3. Results and Discussion

These strategic chokepoints are vividly presented in table 1 below

Table 1. Major World's Maritime Chokepoints and their Features

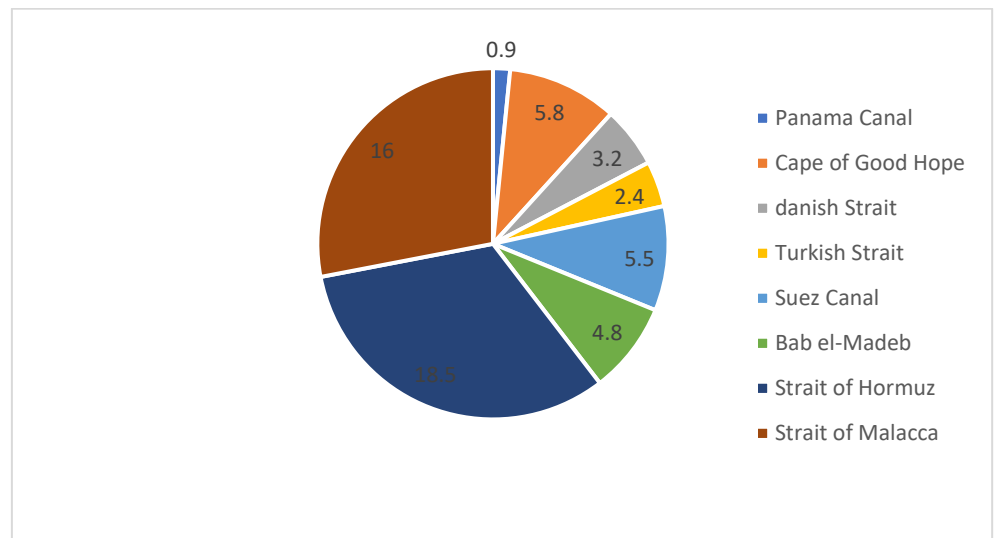
S/N	Chokepoint	Connecting	Bordering Countries	Type	Width	Affected by Incidents
1	Strait of Hormuz	The Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, and the Indian Ocean	Iran, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Oman	Natural - Strait	48 km	War, Piracy, Threat of terrorism, for example; Tanker War (1984 – 1987)
2	Bab el-Mandeb	The Red Sea and the Arabian Sea	Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti, and Yemen	Natural - Strait	32 km	War, Piracy, Threat of terrorism and Hijacking for example USS Cole Attack (2000)
3	Suez Canal	The Mediterranean and the Red Sea	Egypt	Artificial waterway	0.2 km	War, Diplomatic disputes, Operational incidents for examples; Six Days War, Invasion of Sinai

						Peninsula and Ever Given blockade (2021)
4	Panama Canal	The Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans	Panama	Artificial - Canal	0.3 km	Infrastructure, dimensions and weather and climate for example Panama Canal closure due to heavy rains (2010)
5	Gibraltar Strait	The Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean	Spain, Gibraltar (UK), and Morocco	Natural - Strait	13 km	Weather and climate, Blockade by the Spanish Republican Navy (1936)
6	Malacca Strait	The Indian Ocean, the South China Sea, and the Pacific Ocean	Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia	Natural - Strait	2.5 km	Diplomatic disputes, Piracy, Threat of terrorism for examples Orapin 4 piracy attack (2014)
7	Turkish Straits	The Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea	Turkey	Natural - Strait	1 km	Environmental issues like Constant pollution of Marmara Sea and straits due to heavy ships traffic

Sources: Adapted from United States Energy Information Administration (2023)

Table 1 illustrates that the three primary worldwide chokepoints—the Suez Canal, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Bab-el-Mandeb—are situated in the Middle East. The Suez Canal and the SUMED Pipeline serve as critical conduits for the transportation of Persian Gulf oil, natural gas, fertilisers, and grain to Europe and North America [17]. The Suez Canal in Egypt links the Red Sea and the Gulf of Suez to the Mediterranean Sea. The Bab el-Mandeb strait is situated between the Arabian Peninsula and Djibouti in the Horn of Africa, linking the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden.

Figure 1 below illustrates the amount of crude oil and petroleum liquids transiting via chokepoints, so underscoring the geostrategic significance of these chokepoints to nations' economic hegemony within the global system.



Source: Adapted from United States Energy Information Administration (2017)

Figure 1. Volume of Crude Oil and Petroleum Liquids Transit Through Chokepoints.

The supply of liquefied natural gas (LNG), constituting one-third of worldwide LNG commerce, also transits via this port. The obstruction of oil passage via these critical chokepoints, even momentarily, would result in significant supply delays and increased shipping costs, thus elevating global energy prices, while alternate routes remain very restricted [18].

Therefore, considering the importance of these chokepoints and waterways, the United States' foreign policy which defines its national interests ensure its safety and easy access by conducting different military exercises in collaboration with its allies in these areas as shown in table 2 below.

Also, the United States' geostrategic interests of maintaining its military bases in the Middle East, supporting the sovereignty of Israel, protecting client states, preventing the spread of Islamic extremism/terrorism, preventing the spread of nuclear weapon are also linked with the interests of ensuring access and control of the chokepoints and waterways. For instance, these chokepoints and waterways are highly vulnerable to disruption due to conflicts, terrorism, and piracy as shown in table 1 above. Also, these chokepoints and waterways can be closed from the passage of oil, energy, fertilizer or grains by unfriendly states, conflicts, terrorists, and pirates' activities which, if allowed, will heavily impact on the economy of the United States and its allies as shown in table 1 above showing activities likely to affects the various choke points [19].

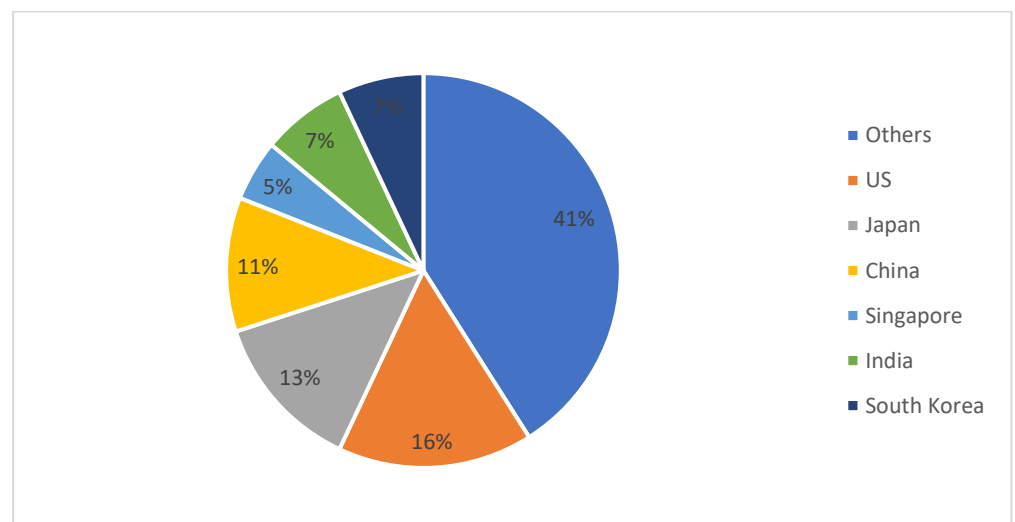
Therefore, in order to ensure access to these chokepoints and water ways, United States considers maintaining its military bases in the region, supporting the sovereignty of Israel, protecting client states and friendly regimes, fighting Islamic extremism/terrorism, preventing the spread of nuclear weapon as core national interests in the region which greatly influences US mediation roles and as well shaped the peace process in the Arab-Israeli conflicts. The United States military bases as shown in table 2 below provide security in the waterways, protect US ships and vessels, protects Israel's sovereignty, client States and friendly regimes, and prevent the spread of Islamic extremism/terrorism. Israel shares same values and ideology with the United States and are highly skilled technologically and therefore, is of immense importance in protecting the interests of US in the region hence its security and sovereignty is important to the US which strengthens US support for Israel and also impacts on the conflict significantly [20].

The impacts of the United States' Geo-Strategic Interests on the Arab-Israeli Conflict

The United States' geostrategic interests in the region impacted significantly on the Arab-Israeli conflict which contributed to the protraction of the conflict. These US' geostrategic interests in the region have shaped the peace process in the conflict in several ways as exhaustively discussed below;

The United States geostrategic interest of accessing and controlling world's maritime choke points and the Arab-Israeli conflict. The United States' interests in accessing and controlling the world's major maritime chokepoints considerably influence the Arab-Israeli tensions in the Middle East. The United States utilises maritime chokepoints for oil and energy exportation; for example, the Suez Canal serves as a critical conduit for Persian Gulf oil and natural gas supplies to Europe and North America. The SUMED pipeline conveys crude oil to America via Egypt, with a capacity of 2.5 million barrels daily. The Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, situated between the Horn of Africa and the Middle East, links the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea, as seen in Table 1 above, and is used for the shipping of oil and grains to the United States.

The Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's most important oil chokepoints and the US has involved in several military exercises to ensure the protection of this choke point in the Middle East, see table 2. The protection of these choke points by the United States has an indirect impact on the Arab-Israeli conflicts, and contributes to the prolongation of the conflict in the following ways: The US protection of choke points helps maintain its regional influence and dominance, which perpetuates the status quo and limit the ability of other nations to intervene or broker a resolution to the conflict. The US protection of choke points through the various military exercise shown in table 2 secures transportation of oil and gas to Israel, which reinforces Israel's energy security and reduces its incentive to negotiate a resolution to the conflict. Figure 2 below show countries and the percentage of oil they transport through the strait of Hormuz.



Sources: Adapted from United States Energy Information Administration (2023)

Figure 2. Countries and Percentage of Oil Transportation Through the Strait of Hormuz.

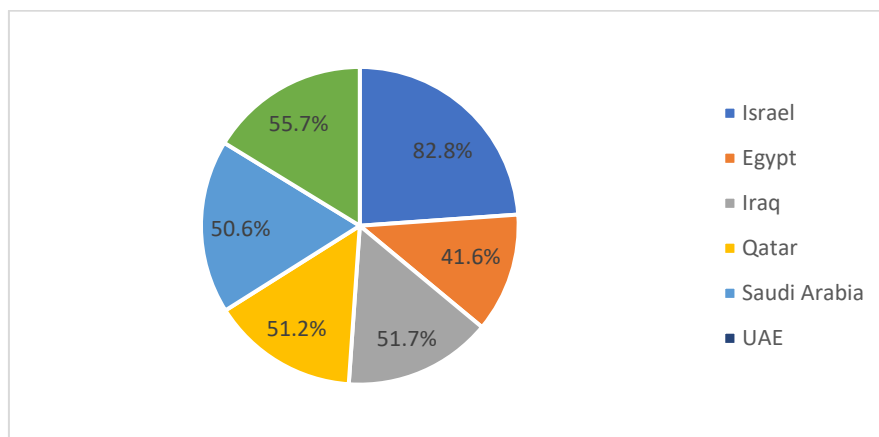
Table 2. United States' Military Exercises in The Various Maritime Choke Points and Waterways in The Middle East

S/N	Year	Location	Military Operations	Purposes
1	2019	Straits of Hormuz	Operation Sentinel	A multinational maritime security initiative to protect

2	2020	Straits of Hormuz	Exercise Horizon	New	shipping in Straits of Hormuz A bilateral exercise with Bahrain to enhance interoperability
3	2020	Suez Canal	Exercise Bright Star		A multinational exercise with Egypt and other regional partners to promote security of the waterways and the regions
4	2019	Suez Canal	Exercise Response	Eagle	A bilateral exercise with Egypt to enhance maritime security and counter-terrorism capabilities
5	2011 to 2023	Bab-el-Mandeb Straits, Gulf of Eden and Indian Ocean	Exercise Express	Cutlass	an annual multinational maritime exercise conducted in the vicinity of the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, the Gulf of Aden, and the Indian Ocean designed to promote maritime security and cooperation among participating nations
6	2019	Bab-el-Mandeb	Exercise Red Reef		A bilateral exercise with Saudi Arabia to enhance maritime interoperability and security
7	2019	Gulf of Oman	Exercise Horizon	Nautical	A bilateral exercise with Oman to enhance maritime security and cooperation.
8	2020	Gulf of Oman	Exercise Sea Breeze		A multinational exercise with regional partners to promote maritime stability and security
9	2020	Persian Gulf	Exercise Alliance	Spartan	A bilateral exercise with Kuwait to enhance maritime security and cooperation.
10	2019	Persian Gulf	Exercise Resolve	Eagle	A multinational exercise with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to enhance maritime security and counter-terrorism capabilities.

Source: Roblin

The US military presence in the region, including the protection of choke points, contributes to regional tensions and perpetuates the conflict by maintaining a state of military preparedness and deterrence. The protection of these choke points limits Palestinian economic development by restricting access to natural resources, markets, and trade routes perpetuate the conflict by maintaining Israeli economic superiority over Arabs which causes grievances on the side of the Arabs. Also, the US protection of choke points undermine international efforts to resolve the conflict by limiting the ability of other nations to impose economic pressure or sanctions on Israel to encourage negotiations. It is important to note that these protection of choke points is not the primary cause of the Arab-Israeli conflicts, but rather a contributing factor to its prolongation. This is because the conflict is driven by complex political, historical, and religious factors, and its resolution requires a comprehensive and inclusive approach that addresses those underlying issues, see Figure 3



Source: Roblin

Figure 3. US Arms Sales to Client and Friendly Regimes in the Middle East, 2000-2023.

The Strategic alliance between US and Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict

The Strategic alliance between US and Israel obviously made US to prioritise the security of Israel over other parties in the conflict by providing military and economic aids and diplomatic support to Israel. This reinforces the status quo, which led to prioritising the welfare of Israelis over that of Arabs especially Palestinians. The United States' closeness and supports to Israel strengthen the above findings which is evidenced by the great assistance the United States provide to Israel as shown in figure 2 above. However, figure 2 above shows that 82.8% of Israeli arms are imported from the United States, this often supports Israeli's aggressive responses that cause heavy losses to the Arabs, including Palestine as one of the main parties involved in this conflict. U.S. foreign policy in the Arab-Israeli conflicts has always been biased which tends to favor Israel.

Moreover, the United States' biased activities in the war intensified throughout President Donald Trump's administration. His policies towards the Arab-Israeli disputes demonstrate clear support for Israeli interests, exacerbating the tensions between the opposing factions. These policies include the acknowledgement of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and the relocation of the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, as well as a reduction in financing for UNRWA and USAID, which compromised their operations in Palestinian territories. The most recent action was to acknowledge Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights. This move undoubtedly reinforced Israel's dominance in the area. The Trump administration refrains from engaging with Palestinians or including their perspectives in regional decision-making, in contrast to past administrations that acknowledged Palestinians as a significant entity in the peace process with Israel. Moreover, Trump's policies compromised any future peace agreements by endorsing Israel, corroborating the conclusions of Hunt and Shvili. The United States' predominant backing for Israel compromises its capacity as a mediator in conflict resolution, since this partiality obstructs the peace process and exacerbates the prevailing turmoil. It is essential to have impartial entities capable of remaining neutral towards both sides, enabling the conflicting parties to swiftly identify mutually acceptable common ground for a peaceful conclusion.

Preventing the spread of Islamic extremism/terrorism and the Arab-Israeli conflict

Preventing the spread of Islamic extremism/terrorism is one of the geo-strategic interests of US in the region. However, the US' policy on Islamic extremism/terrorism in the region aligns with Israeli interests which helps in perpetuating the conflict due the opposing stands of the Arabs on terrorism. The United States' counter-terrorism efforts have contributed to the prolongation of the Arab-Israeli conflict in several ways. For

instance, the US has historically provided unconditional economic, military and diplomatic support to Israel to fight terrorism. Israel has been the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. foreign aid since its founding in 1948 as shown in figure 2 above. This support has enabled Israel to maintain its occupation and military actions against Palestinians extremist groups which is currently perpetuating the conflict.

The US primary focused on combating Islamist terrorism has led to a neglect of the Palestinian issue and the root causes of the conflict. The US counter-terrorism operations include targeted killings and drone strikes at suspected terrorists' hideouts or tunnels, which have often resulted in civilian casualties, thereby destabilising the region. However, the US hardly apply sufficient pressure on Israel to end its occupation and responses to the Hamas attacks on Israel but rather constantly providing all round support to Israel which has allowed the conflict to continue. Also, the US counter-terrorism efforts have sometimes inadvertently contributed to the radicalisation of extremist groups, which further complicate the conflict due to the solidarity supports from Hezbollah and Housthi. By prioritising counter-terrorism efforts over a comprehensive resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, the US supports to Israel have inadvertently contributed to the conflict's prolongation.

Moreover, the United States uses its veto power in the UN Security Council to obstruct resolutions about the war, so protecting Israel from international responsibility. The United States blocked a resolution urging Israel to halt its war in Lebanon. The United States rejected a resolution denouncing Israel's acquisition of the Syrian Golan Heights, which continues to be under Israeli rule. The United States' veto authority at the United Nations has facilitated the extension of the Arab-Israeli conflict in many ways: The United States has used its veto power to obstruct many UN resolutions that criticise Israel's activities, including issues connected to settlements, human rights, and occupied areas.

The US veto has enabled Israel to flout international law and UN resolutions, therefore sustaining its occupation and military operations in Gaza. Through the use of its veto power, the United States has safeguarded Israeli interests, undermining international law, Palestinian rights, and the pursuit of a peaceful settlement, thus exacerbating the duration of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The UN peace plan has failed to resolve the dispute owing to the veto capabilities of the US and its allies, undermining the UN's objective of achieving global peace. Nevertheless, the inability of the UN and the US to establish peace in the Middle East and globally has resulted in the development of terrorist organisations and an intensification of terrorism-related atrocities and conflicts worldwide.

4. Conclusion

The interests of the United States, as the principal participants in the mediation process, have influenced and continue to influence the continuing conflict between Israel and the Arabs. The United States' actions and inactions, driven by its geostrategic interests, exhibit a bias in favour of Israel. This prejudiced disposition was exacerbated under President Donald Trump's presidency. His policies encompass the acknowledgement of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and the relocation of the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, the defunding of NGOs such as UNRWA and USAID that compromised their operations in Palestinian territories, the withdrawal from UN entities perceived as antagonistic towards Israel, and the recognition of Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights. This analysis suggests that the prolongation of this war is significantly anchored in US geostrategic objectives in the Middle East, which affects its mediation role in the dispute.

Recommendations

Arising from the findings of the study, the following recommendations were put forward:

1. Arab states should reduce their military dependence on the United States to ensure diversification of defense partnerships and greater negotiating powers. Reducing dependency on U.S. military assistance and diversifying defense partnerships could allow for more balanced negotiations and increased regional agency.
2. The United States should reevaluate its support structures to encourage genuine peacebuilding in the region by shifting its policy from military assistance and strategic balancing with Israel and Arab States toward genuine peacebuilding initiatives that serve its interests and those of the actors in the conflict.
3. Security Council of United Nations, the Arab League and the US should re-assess their peace initiatives in resolving the conflict and immediately design a proper peace plan with adequate implementation strategies and financial provisions that addresses the concerns of the parties in conflict.

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